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## For Your Bookshelf – “The Automotive Alchemist”

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At the start of his book, Andy Saunders dedicates it to his late mum and dad, saying “Their skills, talents and love steered me in the right direction for life”.

Well I feel that they would be very proud of Andy, not only for his custom car creations that are revered and respected around the world, but also for the way in which he has put together this tour de force of a book. In it he details his imaginative thinking behind, and dedicated building of, 60 very special vehicles during the last four decades. In most cases he started with a vehicular wreck and transformed them into fantastic cars, each one of which is unique – and testament to Andy’s cleverness and dedication to the build.

I first met Andy in the early 1980s, when as a Features Writer on ‘Motorist’ magazine (formerly ‘Practical Motorist’), I wrote several articles on his car creations of the time, notably his amazing modified Minis. I was impressed by his enthusiasm, his vision for taking a vehicle and making it into something different and special, and his determination in achieving the goals he set for himself at the outset of each project. Each one took many hours to complete, often working late into the night, but Andy’s vision of the end product helped him see the project through to completion.

By his own admission Andy was not keen on school work and writing; it was cars that inspired him. Indeed, he told me that his English teacher always said he was good at English and loved his essays, but when he got to the last two years of formal education he was so excited about working on cars with his dad after getting out of school that he never did English homework. In fact he wasn’t allowed to sit the exam as his course work was taken into account as part of the qualification. So he left secondary modern ungraded in English due to his love of cars!

When reading his comprehensive text for this book you wouldn’t know that at one time Andy



was not enthusiastic about writing. It has been written in an honest and engaging way, to put on record what he has achieved in creating his very special custom cars.

He takes the reader through a fascinating journey, starting with the automotive encouragement he received from his dad Ron, who ran a car sales garage in Poole, Dorset.

As a teenager Andy started to build/modify vehicles of all sorts, applying his genius in innovative ways to cars of all makes, models and styles, and the sheer breadth and depth of his imagination comes through in his enthusiastic descriptions of every one of the projects described in his book. I should also add that it is illustrated with superb photographs of each vehicle.

It is difficult to single out specific projects covered, but among highlights, and to start with, I feel that Andy's first project, his Escort Mark I-based 'Bird Puller' deserves special mention, not least as it was conceived and put together with the help of Andy's dad, Ron, who was so inspirational for Andy in his automotive career.

Throughout this book I couldn't help marvelling at the 'before and after' photographs and descriptions of each project, in terms of how on earth Andy could look at a wreck and visualise a completed vehicle. These thoughts apply to all the vehicles featured, but among so many other masterpieces, the following are just a few examples: 'Rainbow Chaser' (starting from a 1961 Volvo 121 Amazon two door saloon), 'Indecision' (based on a 1976 Citroën CX 2000 Pallas), 'X-2000' (built around a 1962 Ford Mercury Monterey), 'Picasso's Citroën' (beginning with a 1983 2CV), 'Hesperus' (1930s New Forest taxi), 'Tetanus' (the base vehicle was a 1937 Cord 812 Westchester) and the magnificent 'Déjà', which features on the book's front cover (Delahaye 135M based and 'Made only by using parts from other old cars').

Within the 'dream' story told in the pages of his volume Andy also explains how his custom work has led to invitations to appear at prestigious car shows around the world, as well as on television, and his vehicles have won multiple awards. He has also received commissions



from major players in the world of cars, usually requiring him to build an 'impossible' dream vehicle within a time frame that is hardly achievable!

## Book Awards...

Andy's book has already won several awards, and has been shortlisted for more.

In May 2023 it was awarded 'Best Book on Design' by Motorworld in Munich.

In November 2023, in the RAC Motoring Book of the Year Awards, it was judged "Best Debut Author".

At the time of writing (mid-November 2023) we have just heard that 'The Automotive Alchemist' is in the running for another prestigious award too.

## VERDICT

Like Andy's custom creations, this is a unique and very special motoring book, a fabulous autobiographical true story; I thoroughly enjoyed working my way through it from cover to cover. Indeed I couldn't put it down...